BLACKBERRY

Case Study

Automating Eurodesign's Field Service with BlackBerry and Onset's METAmessage Technology

Eurodesign faced a typical manufacturing challenge. Highly skilled at building and installing kitchen cabinetry for the building sector, their field installation processes were inefficient. Since this business process affects every aspect of their customer service, from managing job acceptance and status to customer updates, they began searching for a way to automate their paper-based activities with a performance-enhancing wireless solution.

Eurodesign discovered that finding the right wireless solution could be complex - often driven by matching the users' needs to the pros and cons of the available solutions. After several unsuccessful trials with other technologies, Eurodesign chose BlackBerry Wireless Handhelds™ with the BlackBerry Enterprise Server™, using Onset Technology's METAmessage® software solution.

With a pilot project completed, and deployment to 120 users underway, Eurodesign is excited about the business process improvements they foresee, such as:

- Status reports, sent wirelessly from field personnel, will enable better workflow management by supervisors
- Better reporting to maximize the productivity of the workforce
- The ability to wirelessly transfer hours logged to internal payroll systems
- Customers will gain better information on the status of their jobs
- Quick and simple user training
- Very little impact on the existing enterprise infrastructure

Imagine spending the lion's share of your day on a building site, miles from the factory, with spotty access to cell phone coverage, and no reliable way of keeping in touch with your supervisor or company. You rely on work orders you pick up at the factory to know what job you're on; and when you get the chance, you return the completed paperwork by fax, or the next time you see your supervisor.

Company

Eurodesign

Industry

Manufacturing/Field Service

Solution Overview

Business Situation

Eurodesign's field force used a paper-based process to receive and act on work orders. Under this system, the company had no way to easily track the status of jobs and report back to their customers or automate their payroll systems.

Solution

Eurodesign is a business-to-business cabinet manufacturer serving the building industry in California, Nevada and Arizona. The company's 212,000 square-foot manufacturing facility, located in southern California, is the base for a field installation crew of 130 technicians and supervisors.

Benefits

Deploy 120 BlackBerry® handhelds with the BlackBerry Enterprise Server to Eurodesign's field force, sales force and select executives. Onset Technology's METAmessage software will provide the connection between messaging and the company's corporate information systems and create a simple forms-based interface for more efficient reporting.

Results

Eurodesign's forms-based reporting system will help better manage their field personnel, improve customer service and increase the efficiency of their operations - while achieving a 250% return-on-investment over two years..

For Eurodesign, a company that prides itself on being forward-thinking and committed to investing in technology, this system had obvious drawbacks. "Our biggest challenge was not knowing what was going on in the field," says Dennis Retherford, VP, Operations. "By the time paperwork was catching up with us, a week or two had gone by. We had to invest a lot of effort tracking down installers by phone to check their status on a job so we could report back to our customers."

En Route to a Wireless Solution

Retherford says his company spent more than a year thoroughly investigating the marketplace in search of a solution that would put them in closer touch with their field personnel. They tested laptops, digi-tablets that used a stylus input method, and mini laptops. In each instance, they found limitations.

Devices such as laptops were too cumbersome for people on the move. Many interfaces were too complex for the user to understand and didn't integrate with the enterprise's back-end systems. Some simply weren't durable enough to be manhandled on a job site.

Eurodesign then moved to the PDA market, attracted by the portability of the devices. What they gained in accessibility, they lost in enterprise friendliness. Proprietary technologies on many PDAs made it difficult for Eurodesign to customize a solution to their needs and to seamlessly interact with their SQL database.

"Right about the time I was really pulling my hair out, I came across BlackBerry and Onset Technology," says Retherford. "We installed the BlackBerry Enterprise Server, and began a pilot project, implementing Onset Technology's METAmessage software to automate our work orders. Whoever used BlackBerry felt it was superior to any previously seen solution, and most loved it 100%."

Automating a Forms-based Reporting System

The field service solution they will have in place involves sending work orders on the BlackBerry handheld. Field installers can accept or reject a job, indicate when they are onsite, and log their hours. The system will allow supervisors to better manage their staff by knowing, at-a-glace, if a job has been accepted, started and finished and, ultimately, if there are any issues related to material shortages.

Once at the job site, field installers will be able to easily log their hours, which will then be sent to the network for payroll updates. Eurodesign will have faster access to information about the thousands of jobs they manage to provide better customer service information.

Onset Technology's METAmessage software enables this enhanced productivity with a forms-based solution. Operating behind the firewall, and supporting Eurodesign's Microsoft® Exchange environment, it uses the email transport to automatically update and synchronize work orders. Using the METAmessage forms builder, Eurodesign has customized a series of user-friendly wireless forms on the BlackBerry handhelds.

Eurodesign determined that a forms-based versus a browser-based solution was right for them. With their field force on building sites, they realized their people couldn't spend precious time trying to find the connectivity needed for an online browser. METAmessage's store-and-forward model meant that installers could update their information on the forms-based application, and whether they were in a coverage area or not, BlackBerry would store and automatically forward the data.
"The criteria for us was always that our installers cannot spend more than 15 seconds updating status," says Retherford. "Anything that requires a long login, or waiting for screens to pop up and refresh, means people will give up midway and never complete the reporting. It has to be quick and seamless - and can't involve having to pick up a user manual or a lot of key strokes."

Pilot Project Delivers Promising Results

Eurodesign's pilot project with Onset Technology's forms-based solution has already returned both anecdotal and calculated ROI. The company automated a few of the forms they will ultimately use on the BlackBerry handheld - allowing a supervisor to send a job ticket to an installer and then monitor the job's status.

"We had fantastic results," says Retherford. "The three-day battery life of the BlackBerry handhelds is very impressive. And we could see who is online, because they had logged in through their BlackBerry handheld. Our supervisors and customer service center had an instant picture of where the field force was. We greatly reduced the amount of effort required to track down people and had a 'Who Is Where' view."

Retherford has also calculated that the return-on-investment for the combined BlackBerry and Onset Technology solution will be almost 250%, delivering a savings of nearly $300,000 over two years. His math is based on assigning a monetary value to every transaction - from sending email to payroll entries. Estimates that he emphasizes are extremely conservative.
Beyond the fiscal savings, the benefits of this solution for Eurodesign are multi-fold:

- Quicker status reports from field personnel will help supervisors better manage the workflow of the team
- With better reporting, field personnel could be deployed to more jobs, maximizing the productivity of the workforce
- Field installers' hours will be logged onsite and automatically entered into the payroll system
- Customers will gain better information on the status of their jobs, giving Eurodesign an edge in the marketplace
- METAmessage and BlackBerry handhelds were quick to rollout in one or two days
- The solution is built on an open rather than a proprietary platform, allowing Eurodesign to customize it to their future needs
- Administration is simple and integrates with Eurodesign's infrastructure
- User training is quick, simple and minimal

With the highly mobile BlackBerry solution, they hope to improve efficiency in every aspect of the business. One day, Retherford hopes supervisors in the factory will use BlackBerry handhelds in their jobs, to check the status of materials moving throughout their large facility.

"It's a great solution," says Retherford. "In a simple way, it resolves some of the most complex challenges, in terms of customer service and operational efficiency."

Savings in Year One with the Combined BlackBerry and Onset Technology Solution
(Calculated over 229 days with 122 potential users)

Activity	Value	Savings
1 time-sensitive message/day/user	25 cents/message	$62.50/per user/per year
130 payroll entries/day/user	3 cents/entry	$812.50/per user/per year
180 scheduling entries/day/user	2 cents/entry	$675/per user/per year
Savings on cell phone charges	10 min/day	$26.40/per user/per year
Total Productivity Savings (at an hourly rate of $16/hr)		$2,243.07/per user/per year
TOTAL OVERALL SAVINGS (for 122 users)		$273,654.13
TOTAL COST OF DEPLOYMENT/122 USERS	$160,035	

© 2004 Research In Motion Limited. All rights reserved. The BlackBerry and RIM families of related marks, images and symbols are the exclusive properties and trademarks of Research In Motion Limited. RIM, Research In Motion, "Always On, Always Connected", the 'envelope in motion' symbol, BlackBerry and the BlackBerry logo are registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and may be pending or registered in other countries. METAmessage® is a registered trademark of Onset Technology. All other brands, product names, company names, trademarks and service marks are the properties of their respective owners. The specifications and features contained in this document are subject to change without notice.